DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 295 252 CS 506 196

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TITLE Assessing Women in the Creative Department: What Creative Directors Think.
PUB DATE Jul 88
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (71st, Portland, OR, July 2-5, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Advertising; *Creativity; *Employed Women; Employer Attitudes; *Equal Opportunities (Jobs); Females; Media Research; Professional Development; *Sex Bias
IDENTIFIERS *Advertising Agencies; Advertising Industry; Advertising Occupations

ABSTRACT

A study examined the status of women in the creative departments of advertising agencies. In November 1987, questionnaires were sent to the creative directors of the 196 member agencies of the Adcraft Club of Detroit (the largest advertising club in the nation). Sixty-four questionnaires were returned. Answers and comments from the directors surveyed tended to support the notion that women have either achieved parity with men or are moving toward that goal. The vast majority of respondents found no difference in the creativity level between men and women and no difference between men and women with regard to stimulation to creativity. While a majority of respondents said that women did not have greater opportunities to advance in the creative department compared to other departments in an advertising agency, one-third believed women had better opportunities in the creative department. Also, creative directors from smaller agencies were more likely to see women as easier than men to stimulate toward creativity, compared to creative directors at larger agencies who saw little or no difference. General comments about women in advertising tended to be positive, with some suggesting that parity had already been achieved in a business that depends on results and others suggesting that women had made great strides toward equality in recent years. (Six tables are included and eight references are attached.) (ARH)

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ASSESSING WOMEN IN THE CREATIVE DEPARTMENT:

WHAT CREATIVE DIRECTORS THINK

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WHAT CREATIVE DIRECTORS THINK

INTRODUCTION

What is the status of women in the creative departments of advertising agencies? As more and more women undertake careers in journalism and mass communication, there is continuing concern about education preparation, pay differentials, impeded career advancement, discrimination, and lack of management opportunities (Gersh, 1988; Mills, 1988; Sentman and Frith, 1988; Stuart and Dickey, 1988; Wesson, 1987; Wilson, 1988). The creative department was chosen for the study because creative departments tend to be judged by their output and whether or not that output gets the desired results for the client (Ogilvy, 1983). Interpersonal considerations such as "old boys networks" tend to be less important in the creative department compared to other departments of an advertising agency. Advertising agency creative directors were surveyed to assess career opportunities for women in creative departments.

METHOD

A questionnaire with space for comments was sent to the creative directors of the 196 member agencies of the Adcraft Club of Detroit, the largest advertising club in the nation with more than 4,000 individual members ("Rob Breiner," 1988).

Questionnaires were mailed November 12, 1987. Sixty-four, 33 percent, completed the confidential survey forms and returned them within 60 days. Return addresses on envelopes showed many of the best-known names in the advertising business as well as some little-known names. Not all respondents

were from the state of Michigan. Three were from Ohio, one from Pennsylvania, one from Texas, one from California, and one from Australia. Five envelopes came back marked "return to sender." Results were computer analyzed for frequencies and tested for significance under appropriate SPSS techniques under the direction of I-Ming Aron of the Central Michigan University Computer Services Department.

RESULTS

Demographics

Creative directors were asked to supply five key demographic items: age, sex, full-time years in advertising, number of people under direct supervision, and annual billings of their agency.

Most of the creative directors, 79 percent, were in the 35-and-over age bracket. A greater percentage, 84 percent, were male. Even more had been in the business more than 5 years, 92 percent. The most common number of people supervised was 5 or more, 60 percent. The most common level of annual billings was under $10 million, 63 percent. (TABLE 1)

First Question

Respondents were asked if they found a difference in the creativity level between men and women. Eighty-five percent replied "no," and 15 percent "yes."

Comments included the following from a respondent who answered "no": "Creativity can only be judged on the individual--you might as well ask the difference between Black and White, Chinese or Indian and so on! I've seen both bad and both very good." Another respondent who said "no" added "...men express themselves more openly, probably a result of socialization of the

sexes."

On the "yes" side, one respondent wrote: "(the difference) is more in the terms of 'differing experiences to draw upon,' and not in making a blanket statement that men are smarter and more creative than women." Another "yes" respondent suggested that "men's work is usually more focused."

Second Question

Most respondents, 91 percent, believed that there was "no difference" in the creative level of men and women. Seven percent said that men were more creative and 2 percent said women were more creative. (TABLE 3)

Only one respondent offered a substantive comment about this question. A "no" respondent wrote, "(it) depends on education, environment, upbringing, etc."

Third Question

Creative directors were asked if men or women were easier to stimulate with regard to creativity. Most respondents, 88 percent, said there was no difference while 7 percent said that women were easier to stimulate and 5 percent said men were. (TABLE 4)

Three respondents who answered "no difference" added comments. One wrote "Again (it) depends on personality, attitude, education, environment, etc." Another said, "If the person is dedicated to their work and can motivate themselves through given opportunity, I wouldn't care if they were part animal!" A third respondent made the following lengthy comment: "These are the deciding factors: Is the person bright or not? Is the person driven or not? Does the person simply want to be the best gosh-darn writer/art director/producer in the world or not? Does the person respect the creative

director's opinion or not? Is the person open-minded or not?"

The only other respondent who commented favored men as easier to stimulate with regard to creativity. The respondent wrote, "Of the best creative men and women I know, they are equal, but in sheer numbers men are generally more creative than women."

Fourth Question

Respondents were asked whether or not women had a greater opportunity for advancement in the Creative Department of an advertising agency than in the other departments of the agency. Seventy-one percent said that opportunities for women were no greater in the creative department while 29 percent said that career advancement chances were greater for women in the creative department. (TABLE 5)

Those stating that women had greater career advancement chances in the creative department than in other departments tended to cite women's creative superiority. One wrote, "Good ideas are so rare in advertising that anybody who comes up with them soon breaks out of the pack. Women should compete aggressively in the creative arena (as opposed to the "pink collar" specialties like media, clerical/administrative and research) because their ideas will have more clout and visibility." Another said, "I've noticed that other departments are far more conservative, far more traditional. There is often a fear (sometimes well-grounded) that a client will be so sexist as not to give women a fair shake. There's a little more latitude in a good creative department for a woman to be accepted for what she is rather than how well she fits the traditional male definition of a driven career person." A third stated, "Women have been regarded as more creative (versus mechanical, or action-oriented) than men since the early Middle Ages in Western culture.

We're predisposed to see them that way. It's a line of least resistance in all parts of our culture. The question is whether creativity will in the future become less art and more science as we pin down the process better." A fourth wrote that women fare better in the creative department because it "looks for results" while the account side is "more traditional." A fifth added, "Creative doesn't have as much client contact, so agencies can't hide behind a 'the client is old-fashioned excuse.'" A sixth wrote, "Creativity sells. Whoever has the most creativity wins. If women can get their ideas across and get the credit from them, they can move up in advertising." Other "yes" respondents included the following comments: "the concept of artists being more liberal" contributes to equal numbers of men and women in creative departments where the respondent has worked; "it depends on the operations of the agency, the individuals one is working with, and the woman herself"; "women go above and beyond the call of duty--usually--if they're interested in getting ahead"; "if they're good enough"; and "they work for less."

Several respondents who said "no" commented that women's contributions were the key to advancement, not gender. One wrote, "Good ideas, good artwork, good design and layout, good copy knows no sex. Agencies need people who can PRODUCE ... and being male or female shouldn't get in the way." Another said, "I don't feel gender is an appropriate question in the ad industry, especially (in the) creative (department). Personal experience has proven that gender is not the issue but your mind and abilities to sell a product is." A third commented that women have a positive influence on a creative team "in that their perspective often tempers the approach of the creative team." A fourth wrote, "If the idea is good--sex should not be a factor." Other "no" respondents commented as follows: "it varies more from advertising agency to advertising agency than it does from department to

department within a given agency"; "Only if it is a women-owned agency. Male owned companies hold down income level and creativity"; "women do well in media, research, account management and creative--they may not get the top job in creative (most creative directors are men), but that's not to say that there isn't plenty of room for advancement"; "over the years they seem to be more aggressive than men and they display more energy and willingness to learn"; and "I have a large number of women in the department and they make a great contribution to the group's efforts."

Test of Significance

A chi square test of significance indicated that the answers to the third question--Which do you find easier to stimulate with regard to creativity? Women, Men, or No difference--differed significantly by the number of people supervised. Creative directors who supervised less than five people were more likely to select women as easier to stimulate with regard to creativity than creative directors who supervised five or more people. (TABLE 5)

General Comments on Women in Advertising

Two-thirds of the 15 respondents who wrote comments under the final heading "Comments on women in advertising" took one of two positive positions, either that women had already achieved equality or that women were advancing quickly in the direction of equality.

From the group that believed equality had already been achieved, one respondent wrote, "Others find that women are advancing as a group in advertising, more than other fields." Another said that at his/her agency there were more women on staff than men and that the women "are as good at their jobs as any man." A third respondent wrote, "Advertising at its best

depends on talent regardless of sex. When I started in advertising 20 years ago, some of the most talented people I worked with were women. It didn't occur to me then, and has never occurred to since, that there is any job in advertising that a women couldn't do as well as a man. I think advertising is the one field, more than any other, where women and their creative contributions are welcomed with open arms." A fifth respondent said, "I own an advertising agency....We have no age, race, sex, or any other discrepancy. And because of that we are very successful--and have fun, too."

From the group that believed women were gaining in the race for equality, one respondent wrote, "There are still prejudices in this industry, for women, minorities, etc., however of all the minority groups relative to advertising, they (women) do share the largest piece of the pie outside of the main power structure." A second commented, "Generally advertising is performance-based. A woman, if able to overcome culturalization problems, can advance without limitation. Except that agencies traditionally try to mirror-image clients--(in other words) male-biased clients produce male-biased agencies." A third said that women art directors have better opportunties than women writers, adding "it depends on clients being served; some don't like women at all." A fourth wrote, "Women do well in media, research, account management and creative. They may not get the top job in creative (most creative directors are men), but that's not to say that there isn't plenty of room for advancement." A fifth stated, "There are good ones and bad ones, weepers and bullies, sexpots and drabs. All things considered, I think the rise of the co-ed creative department contributes to better work."

From the remaining respondents who wrote comments came one negative view: "You have exceptions, but I don't think many (women) have had the opportunity. It should change." Three offered what might be termed flip,

perhaps sexist, comments. One wrote "we need more," a second "love 'em," and a third "glad they're here." A fifth took the middle ground: "Really have no comments. Not positive. Not negative. They're just people who dress a little differently (at this point) than men."

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Answers and comments from the creative directors surveyed tended to support the notion that at least in the creative departments of advertising agencies, women have either achieved parity with men or are moving expeditiously toward that goal. The vast majority of respondents found no difference in the creativity level between men and women and no difference between men and women with regard to stimulation to creativity. While a majority of respondents said that women did not have greater opportunities to advance in the creative department compared to other departments in an advertising agency, nearly 3 out of 10 did see women having better opportunities in the creative department. A test of significance found that creative directors from smaller agencies were more likely to see women as easier to stimulate toward creativity than men compared to creative directors at larger agencies who saw little or no difference. General comments about women in advertising tended to be positive with some suggestion that parity had already been achieved in a business that depends on results and others suggesting that women had made great strides toward equality in recent years. Some suggested that male-biased clients lead to male-biased agencies.

In summary, the survey showed that women are making gains in achieving parity with men in creative departments of advertising agencies and in advertising agencies in general. It suggested that where performance not gender is the basis of judgment, women can and are achieving parity with men

and that creative departments, which are by nature performance-based, offer immediate opportunites for women to compete on an equal footing with men and might serve as springboards for women to achieve parity with men in other departments of advertising agencies.

Still, conclusions are tentative and subject to intensive testing and replication. A nationwide sample of creative directors might be undertaken in the future as might a nationwide sample of other department heads in advertising agencies to allow perceptions to be compared across departments. Studies should be rerun every two or three years until women achieve equality with men in the advertising industry, making such studies no longer necessary or valuable.

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TABLE I

AGE

	Frequency	Percent
34 and under	13	21%
35 and over	49	79%
SEX		
Female	10	16%
Male	52	84%
FULL-TIME YEARS IN ADVERTISING		
Less than 5	5	8%
5 or more	57	92%
NUMBER OF PEOPLE SUPERVISED		
Less than 5	25	40%
5 or more	37	60%
ANNUAL BILLINGS OF AGENCY		
Less than $10 million	39	63%
$10 million or more	23	37%

TABLE 2

Do you find a difference in the creativity level between men and women?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	9	15%
No	51	85%

TABLE 3

Which do you find has the higher level of creativity?

Women	1	2%
Men	4	7%
No difference	52	91%

TABLE 4

Which do you find easier to stimulate with regard to creativity?

Women	4	7%
Men	3	5%
No difference	52	88%

TABLE 5

In general, do women have a greater opportunity for career advancement in the Creative Department than in the other departments of an advertising agency?

Yes	18	29%
No	45	71%

TABLE 5

CROSSTABULATION: Which do you find easier to stimulate with regard to creativity? By Number of people under your direct supervision.

	Less than 5	5 or More	Row Total
Women	4	0	4 7%
Men	1	2	3 5%
No Difference	18	34	52 88%
Column Total	23 39%	36 61%	59 100%

Chi square test of significance: .0348 (less than .05 suggests significant difference)